

Understanding and Assessing Testing Accommodations

Scope, Complexity, Capacity

Contributing Authors:

Tammy Berberi
Erin Braselmann
Enjie Hall
Adam Meyer
Maria Schiano
Heather Stout



AHEAD Association on
Higher Education
And Disability®

Executive Summary

This study of testing accommodations is a companion practice paper to the AHEAD resource, **Understanding and Assessing Disability Resource and Staffing Needs** (Scott et al., 2024). This earlier paper provides an overview of all tasks and labor that may be required of disability resource professionals and formulates a holistic approach to needs assessment that situates typical metrics, such as staff to student ratio (i.e. caseload) within a broader analysis to address “what critical work responsibilities are and are not being effectively accomplished in light of current staffing levels and operational practices?” (p. 8). Testing accommodations are one area of complex and varied disability resource operations addressed in that paper that merit closer attention.

Results from the AHEAD 2025 Testing Accommodations Survey that provides the basis for this study highlight increasing accommodation requests, shifting instructional and assessment modalities, and significant resource constraints in a majority of responding offices. In fact, only 22% of respondents feel adequately resourced, while more than 3 in 5 report “making things work.”

Beyond providing extra time or dedicated space, effective testing accommodations often require alternative formats, assistive technology, and the coordination of interpreters, readers, or scribes. The expertise, time, and logistical skill required to manage testing accommodations effectively, particularly within resource constraints that are in some instances acute, are often underestimated. A single professional may manage a complex set of tasks including scheduling, reserving testing spaces, coordinating communication, creating accessible formats, managing a wide array of assistive technologies, proctoring, and providing real time support to students taking tests.

These tasks may be managed entirely by a campus Disability Resource Office, by one or more campus Testing Centers, or by individual faculty/academic departments. Many campuses maintain a combination approach; departments may also adopt or promote assessment strategies that make classroom testing more hospitable, reducing in some measure the need for the most common accommodations.

Effective testing operations depend upon adequate space, staffing, technology, and infrastructure. Institutions operating without sufficient resources face high-

er risks of inconsistent implementation, diminished test integrity, non-compliance, and compromised opportunity for disabled students to demonstrate achievement. The combined impact of these stressors can diminish staff morale, resulting in staff burnout and high rates of turnover.

Effective testing operations depend upon adequate space, staffing, technology, and infrastructure.

This paper identifies four pillars of effective testing accommodations: institutional compliance, equal opportunity, testing integrity, and work/life balance. The self-assessment tool included with this study can enable professionals to identify specific areas of concern and set aside all-or-nothing solutions in favor of more nuanced approaches to supporting all four pillars.

This study of accommodated testing operations:

- proposes values to anchor effective operations.
- outlines existing models and modalities for their administration.
- contextualizes associated tasks and labor.
- discusses the most common challenges that professionals identify in delivering equitable testing experiences.
- provides benchmarks by both institution size and type, enabling readers to situate testing resources and constraints among peer institutions (see Appendices).
- offers a self-assessment tool to identify areas of local need and improve operations.

Intended to equip disability resource professionals with data and recommendations to improve testing operations, this paper does not provide a straightforward recipe for success. Instead, it offers a range of approaches aimed at addressing common operational issues that were identified in the survey. The self-assessment tool that follows the study summarizes recommendations and invites professionals to engage in a systematic review of testing operations in order to develop targeted strategies to support resource requests and systematic change efforts on their campus.

Acknowledgments

My predecessor, Dr. Sally Scott, handed this project to me on my first day of work for AHEAD. A new Director of Research simply wouldn't find for a more supportive, engaged, knowledgeable, and fun group of professional mentors and co-authors than this one. Thank you all for your wisdom, patience, and good will throughout this project.

Tammy Berberi
AHEAD Director of Research

Many thanks to the AHEAD Board of Directors and the following colleagues, who offered expert feedback in their review of this paper in draft form:

Chris Dallager
Mississippi State University

Kelsey Jordan
Purdue University

Zoe Merrill Keating
Portland Community College

Amy A. King
Loyola University New Orleans

Jenna Ladd
University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine

Heather Nash
Ohio Northern University

Kaela Parks
Portland Community College

Sara Rotunno
Colorado College

Spencer Scruggs
University of California Los Angeles

Lori Smith
University of Tennessee Knoxville

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Part I: Introduction

Testing accommodations may be among the earliest disability accommodations, recalling bubble sheets, no. 2 pencils, and bluebooks; they are also the most common – and sometimes the most complex – accommodation to provide. While they sometimes involve only the provision of dedicated space and extra time, testing accommodations may also entail conversion to an alternative format, proficiency with assistive technology and / or a learning management system, and coordination of an ASL interpreter, reader, or scribe.

Significant misunderstandings persist about the complexity and emotional demands of managing accommodated testing. This study aims to elucidate the scope, complexities, expertise, and labor that testing accommodations require. The Testing Accommodations Survey that launched this study clarifies resource inadequacies and their impact, making it possible to offer recommendations that are rooted in the everyday experiences of disability resource professionals.

Nearly 83% of respondents to the Testing Accommodations Survey indicate that testing accommodations on their campus have “increased a little” or “increased a lot.”

The Need for Guidance

Nearly 83% (82.6%) of respondents to the Testing Accommodations Survey indicate that testing accommodations on their campus have “increased a little” or “increased a lot” since the fall of 2022. In fact, only 5.8% of respondents indicate a decrease. Over the same period, both learning and testing modalities have also diversified, requiring the development of new protocols for test administration and security.

Increases are attributable to several factors, including greater diversity, awareness, and self-advocacy skills among disabled students and better diagnostic and screening tools. Reckoning with the implications of generative AI for learning, some instructors are returning to pen-and-paper assessments to ensure academic integrity. This return makes an exception of what had become customary practice during the pandemic—computer-based assessments—and prompts an increase in accommodation requests.

Only 22% of respondents feel they have adequate staffing and testing spaces.

Given these changes, it may come as no surprise that only 22% of respondents feel they have adequate staffing and testing spaces to implement testing accommodations effectively; 15% feel that they do not. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) sit somewhere in the middle, characterizing their everyday efforts as, **“We make things work.”**

The Purpose of this Study

This study of testing accommodations resources, staffing, and practices is intended as a companion to AHEAD’s staffing self-assessment resource, **Understanding and Assessing Disability Resource Office Staffing Needs** (Scott et al., 2024).

The present study:

- discusses the principles that anchor effective testing operations.
- outlines existing models and modalities for testing accommodations administration.
- contextualizes the tasks and labor associated with administering testing accommodations.
- discusses the most common challenges that professionals face in delivering equitable testing experiences.
- offers a self-assessment tool to identify areas of need and improve operations.
- provides benchmarks by both institution size and type, enabling readers to situate testing resources and constraints among peer institutions (see Appendices).

There is no standard recipe for testing accommodations. Rather than a cookbook, this paper introduces productive ways to think about the increasing demand for test accommodations and strategies for meeting that demand, even when additional resources are not forthcoming. Some of these strategies may be feasible for your campus while others may seem entirely aspirational. The intent of this paper is to stimulate productive thinking about what is possible.

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Audience and Uses

Less than a quarter of survey respondents (23.9%) feel that their campus administration understands the expertise and labor associated with administering testing accommodations. Yet professionals who feel that their work is understood attribute improvements to their own efforts to explain and to advocate for what is needed. This paper and associated resources are an invitation to disability resource professionals to develop the data and narrative needed to make targeted and evidence-based changes.

Methodology

Workgroup

The testing accommodations workgroup met twice monthly over the calendar year between February 2025 and April 2026 to develop and administer a member survey about accommodated testing operations, analyze and discuss the results, and draft this paper about findings.

Survey

Data Collection

The Testing Accommodations Survey was open from April 1 to May 2, 2025. The survey received 650 responses, 269 of which were incomplete and discarded, and 381 of which were deemed complete and usable. Response rates vary from one survey question to the next, even among complete responses. For example, many respondents skipped some or all questions about the number of tests administered at their institution but provided valuable information about managing accommodated testing operations with limited resources. All data from a survey deemed complete was cleaned and analyzed for this study.

Topics

The AHEAD Testing Accommodations Survey aimed to understand and elucidate operational norms and complexities and to provide tools to support the ongoing advocacy of professionals charged with managing testing accommodations.

Featuring both quantitative and qualitative questions, the survey yielded information that made it possible to determine benchmarks and provided professionals with an important opportunity to relate a narrative

about accommodated testing operations at their post-secondary institution.

The survey gathered data about the variety of testing models and modalities in use at AHEAD member institutions, the volume of accommodated tests administered, spaces, staffing, equipment, proctoring practices, and operational challenges. Some of the recommendations developed in response to specific survey data points, and others, as a result of thoughtful discussion among workgroup members.

Benchmarks

Survey results yielded several benchmarks, filtered by size and type of institution, including:

- the average number of private testing spaces
- the average number of low-distraction testing seats
- the number of professional staff, conveyed as full-time equivalent, or FTE, in 1) the disability resource office (DRO) and 2) dedicated to testing accommodations.
- the average number of 1) graduate-student hours and 2) undergraduate-student hours dedicated to managing testing accommodations each week.
- the average number of tests administered in the fall term, 2024 1) during the regular term and 2) during finals week.

Institution sizes, featured in Appendix A of this report, align with those used by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES): less than 200 students; 200-999; 1,000-5,000; 5,000-10,000; 10,000-20,000; 20,000-30,000 and more than 30,000 students. Institution types, featured in Appendix B, are based on the 2021 Carnegie Classification: Associate's, Baccalaureate, Master's, Doctoral, and Special Focus.

Responses of "0" were excluded from the calculation of averages. Instead, the number of respondents reporting "0" is provided separately. Two examples that arise often in the data suffice to explain why responses of "0" are significant:

- Institutions reporting 0 private testing seats ($n=31$) must always identify space *ad hoc* to administer a test that requires a reader or a scribe.
- Likewise, institutions that report 0 hours of graduate student labor per week may depend to a greater degree on professional staff, generally a less flexible and more costly source of labor.

These benchmarks represent less an ideal to achieve than a set of data points for comparison to a broad set of institutional peers. Given that institutions develop distinct cultures of assessment, discrete points of comparison may not be entirely valid, but a snapshot of the landscape may nonetheless prove useful in building a narrative. Connecting with your institution's official set of institutional peers is another way to develop useful points of comparison and can yield more contextualized results.

Effective testing accommodations depend upon an ecological and flexible campus-wide approach.

Limitations

To develop a complete understanding of operational norms at postsecondary institutions of differing sizes and types, some specificity was lost. For example, whether a given response originated in a DRO or a testing center was often unclear, as was the administrative relationship between the DRO and the testing center (on campuses where a testing center exists).

The components of accommodated testing are so various, based on a student's individual needs, that responses meant to provide a comprehensive picture are incomplete. For example, the original version of a survey question about the variety of testing accommodations available included a list of 24 possibilities, yet respondents used the comments box to add many, many more to that list. The number of respondents who would have selected each of these additions had they been included in the list of options is not known. Although it is undoubtedly among the most common accommodations, for the purposes of this study, a reduced-distraction environment was considered a space management issue rather than an accommodation.

Survey respondents were not asked to describe operational differences among departments or among undergraduate and graduate programs at their institution. Such differences likely have implications for accommodated testing operations in terms of workflow and the administration of testing spaces and budgets. Survey findings confirm that effective testing accommodations depend upon an ecological and flexible campus-wide approach.

Part II: Foundations

II A. Mission and Values

The mission of testing operations is essentially to provide disabled students the same opportunity as non-disabled students to demonstrate their knowledge by means of an exam. By preventing aspects of disability from negatively affecting performance, testing accommodations ensure that students with disabilities have an equal chance to succeed at a test. According to The National Collegiate Testing Association's *Professional Standards and Guidelines for Test Centers* (2nd ed., 2025), mission fulfillment entails adequate financial resources, adequate and accessible physical facilities, and procedures that ensure the integrity of exam administration while ensuring fair and nondiscriminatory treatment.

Essentially, effective testing accommodations rest upon three pillars: **institutional compliance**, **equal opportunity**, and **integrity**. Survey findings and a seasoned awareness of differences among testing operations prompted the workgroup to adopt a fourth pillar: **work/life balance**.

Institutional Compliance

Survey findings confirm that equal access to programs, services, activities is most often a campuswide enterprise. On some campuses, a strong sense of shared responsibility has prompted campuses or departments to design and promote a range of assessment strategies beyond timed tests. On others, departments/faculty administer uncomplicated accommodations such as extended time or the provision of a reduced-distraction space. Conversely, some strive to reduce the responsibility of the faculty to manage accommodated exams independently. Whatever the model in use, testing accommodations staff should experience sufficient support from campus administration and faculty to pursue changes that relieve stressed testing operations and professionals.

Equal Opportunity

A second imperative is ensuring an equitable testing experience for disabled students. Consider these differences in experience:

On exam day, nondisabled students generally arrive at the classroom or log in online without significant administrative steps.

Disability resource professionals are valuable thought partners in efforts to design more equitable and inclusive assessments.

In contrast, students who use testing accommodations must undertake a series of additional tasks: disclosing aspects of their disability narrative, submitting documentation, sharing accommodation letters, coordinating logistics with instructors, learning office procedures, scheduling tests, and traveling to a different location at a prescribed time, a choice that may entail forfeiting access to their instructors during the exam.

Of course, disabled populations are not a monolith. Mireles and Chiang-Lopez (2025) explore the specific impact of DRO policies on disabled students of color to highlight differences among disabled student populations. Students of color participating in their qualitative study recount how the scrutiny, conformity, and surveillance inherent in DRO procedures resonate in particular ways, heightening stress and creating additional barriers to the supports that they have a right to access. To explore differences in experience, some DRO have developed a variety of ways to gather student input, such as a brief survey, a Student Advisory Board, or other mechanism.

Complete parity between accommodated and standard testing environments may not be possible given resource constraints or the location of testing spaces. However, institutions can assess what adjustments can reduce unnecessary administrative burden, align timelines, and focus on relational and communication skills to more closely approximate the testing experience of nondisabled students. While assessment is the purview of the faculty, disability resource professionals are valuable thought partners in efforts to design more equitable and inclusive assessments. Such efforts ensure that disabled students have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and achieve success.

Academic Integrity

A third imperative concerns the preservation of academic integrity across all testing environments. Differences in monitoring and proctoring can lead

to unintentional inconsistencies. Standardizing protocols across environments promotes fairness and strengthens institutional credibility. Clear procedures for monitoring, documenting, and securing exams ensure that assessments maintain their integrity and that the accommodation process is trusted by faculty, students, and academic departments.

Work/Life Balance

Finally, sustainable testing operations support staff work/life balance. Both the authors' experience and qualitative data from the survey suggest that insufficient resources contribute to burnout and high turnover among professionals charged with testing accommodations. Adequate resources enable effective use of staff time, including the capacity to document activities and workflow.

Recommendations supporting equitable testing experiences, such as aligning testing center hours with the campus course schedule so that accommodated exams can occur concurrently with in-class assessments, may be difficult to implement given current staffing. Although important, this recommendation is not meant to imply that staff should extend their workday or make personal sacrifices. Instead, such recommendations invite institutions to explore creative and flexible approaches to scheduling that expand student access while maintaining reasonable expectations for employees. Sustaining both equity for students and wellbeing for staff is essential to durable, effective testing operations.

This set of four core pillars may at times seem incompatible. For example, how to ensure consistency and account for differences among the experiences of disabled students? The self-assessment tool included with this study can enable professionals to set aside all-or-nothing solutions in favor of a more nuanced approach to identifying specific areas of concern and developing a balanced approach to maintaining all four pillars.

Encourage classroom testing environments to suit a broader range of learners.

II B. Models and Modalities

Models for administering accommodated exams vary widely across, and even within, institutions: while 86% of survey respondents indicate that the DRO is responsible for testing accommodations, "responsible" may mean managing every step of the process from start to finish or determining appropriate testing accommodations so that an accommodated exam can be administered in the testing center (25.5%) or by instructors / academic departments (21.8%). Many campuses maintain a hybrid approach spurred by necessity—because there isn't enough staff or space in the DRO—or to accommodate faculty/departmental preference.

Beyond these schematic elements, many variables impact the implementation of testing accommodations, from the availability and location of appropriate spaces, the types of tests that warrant accommodation, the typical length of exams, and others. Additional factors influence the administration of final exams. Whatever the model(s) in use, clear policies and processes support effective implementation.

DRO manages all accommodated testing

Ideally, the DRO has adequate private and reduced-distraction testing spaces to manage accommodated tests during the regular term, as well as access to flexible spaces that can be reserved during peak testing periods. Permanent staff, hourly, and student employees—and during peak periods, even trained volunteers—may assist with check-in, proctoring, and collecting materials upon test completion.

In the absence of a testing center and adequate testing spaces managed by the DRO, matching available space to a student's specific accommodation can be complicated, and may entail coordination with the Registrar or other units (Student Affairs, campus libraries, etc.). In this case, tests are forwarded to the DRO by instructors and then reformatted as needed for the student. The student may be required to check in at one location and make their way to another location to take the test. One or more proctors may be stationed nearby for questions or concerns that arise. Upon test completion, proctors collect testing materials, return to the DRO, and prepare materials for return to the instructor. Even when a professional has developed a sense of flexible spaces, availability likely shifts with each term, requiring new time and effort.

Campus Testing Center administers accommodated tests

Testing centers often feature low-distraction and private testing spaces and are equipped to manage some testing accommodations. When this is the case, the student typically schedules their test through the Testing Center, and the Testing Center obtains accommodations information from the DRO and testing materials from the instructor. Testing Center staff manages all aspects of the testing appointment and routes completed tests back to the instructor.

Faculty/departments administer most accommodated tests

Specific accommodations and the availability of appropriate spaces often determine which unit administers the test: departments may manage accommodations that are more straightforward to administer, while tests entailing a reader, an ASL interpreter, a scribe, or specific assistive technology indicate the expertise of DRO professionals.

Faculty/departments adopt a broader variety of assessment strategies

Efforts to implement more humane and inclusive assessment in the classroom would not eliminate the need for all testing accommodations, but they would relieve structural inequities and procedural burden for students who might be able to test in the classroom under different testing conditions. The suggestion here is not to pressure students with accommodations to forgo them, but to encourage classroom testing environments to suit a broader range of learners. In the short term, this may amount to simple adjustments such as:

- Providing explicit instruction on how to take a college-level test in a given field
- Distinguishing between formative and summative assessments
- Gathering anonymous student feedback about testing
- Creating untimed assessments or tests that are 10-15% shorter in length (see Gernsbacher et al., 2020 and Weiner et al., 2026)
- Reducing the importance (i.e. weight) of exams in the course grade

With a longer horizon, consider working with campus administration to encourage departmental review of current assessment strategies. The review might encourage faculty to explore together:

- their rationale for current assessment strategies
- the assumptions that undergird the assessment strategies currently in use (see Weiner et al., 2026)
- the extent to which assessment strategies in use are informed by current research
- the extent to which assessment strategies align with institutional strategic goals related to access, equity, and student retention and graduation
- assessments created according to the principles of universal design (see Lazarus et al., 2022)

Given that access and equal opportunity for disabled students are an institutional responsibility, it makes sense to consider campuswide change alongside testing innovation in the office.

Part III: Coordinating Test Accommodations: Institutional Responsibilities and Operational Realities

While the process is often perceived as straightforward—students schedule, faculty submit, and exams are administered—managing testing accommodations involves nuanced decision-making, policy interpretation, and the coordination of multiple accommodated tests. When several students are testing simultaneously, each with unique accommodations, workload intensifies considerably. Further, even the best laid plans can be undermined by last-minute changes in test scheduling or staffing. Unsurprisingly, survey respondents often characterized testing coordination as one of the most emotionally taxing roles in their offices.

Administering a single accommodated exam entails the following steps:

Faculty Coordination: Confirming and coordinating exam details with faculty (date, time, allowable materials, contact information, etc.)

Scheduling: Maintaining a system for students to schedule accommodated tests in advance, including due dates for test requests, managing late test requests, and changes to the testing schedule.

Space Management: Assessing space availability for each exam request relative to all students anticipated to be testing during the same time, including consideration for accommodations such as private room testing, reduced-distraction testing, or a testing location based on the need for technology or a reader/scribe.

Accessible Materials & Technology: Ensuring that the exam is in a format that the student can access and that the technology they need to access the exam is available and functional when the student needs to use it.

Auxiliary Equipment: Ensuring the availability of computers, technology, equipment, and materials that facilitate a variety of accommodated testing scenarios.

Proctoring: Confirming sufficient proctoring resources for each student and all students testing simultaneously based on the space, personnel, and resources required, from implementing check-in protocols to reporting suspected academic dishonesty.

Managing testing accommodations involves nuanced decision-making, policy interpretation, and the coordination of multiple accommodated tests.

Staffing: Maintaining sufficient staff, training, and coordination to administer testing accommodations effectively.

Real-time Attention: Supporting individual test-takers, who may have questions about their test, health monitors, approved breaks, or emotional needs that require staff attention.

Put another way, across all survey responses, more than half of all responding offices manage *all* the following tasks, whether an office of less than 1 FTE or a large operation at a comprehensive university:

hiring professional and student staff; managing professional staff schedules; managing student employee schedules; training proctors; scheduling tests; managing testing seats and spaces; managing and maintaining computers and available software programs; purchasing and managing supplies related to testing accommodations; communicating with faculty; creating accessible test formats; updating LMS-based tests to account for approved time extension; preparing, collecting, and returning tests; proctoring tests; reporting suspected violations of academic integrity; checking in students; assisting students during testing; managing rescheduled tests; coordinating with other units; and training faculty to produce accessible materials and use inclusive assessment strategies.

III A. Accommodations, Technology, & Equipment

Here is only a partial list of the most frequently administered accommodations, from most to least common as reported in the survey. (See IV D. Managing Spaces for a discussion of reduced-distraction testing conditions). Percentages indicate how frequently reporting offices administer a given accommodation:

for example, all responding offices (100%) administer extended time, while about a third of offices (35.2%) administer stop-the-clock breaks.

- 100% - Extended time
- 85% - Access to food/drink during test
- 81.1% - Accessible formats
- 74% - Assistance (e.g., scribe / reader)
- 66.9% - Permission to reschedule due to disability needs
- 36% - Memory aids
- 35.2% - Stop-the-clock breaks
- 33.3% - Accommodations for lab or didactic exams

Survey respondents highlight many additional accommodations, such as permission to use noise-canceling headsets or earplugs or to listen to music, take a test over more than one session, use print-only format, take intermittent breaks (clock continues), use a calculator, or use a device to monitor a health condition. The reasonableness of a given accommodation may depend on many variables, including campus or program emphasis or admissions selectivity. For instance, a memory aid may be deemed reasonable on a campus with open admission but unreasonable at a more selective campus.

Faculty likely have the skills to produce their tests in a format that suits most users.

Accessible Formats

Faculty likely have the skills to produce their tests in a format that suits most users. Roughly the same percentage of survey respondents indicate that DRO staff (56.7%) and faculty/instructors (56.2%) create tests in an accessible format, indicating a combination approach to accessible formats on many campuses.

Assistive Technology

Particularly in the absence of an AT/IT specialist on staff, managing accommodations involving assistive technology can be a formidable task. Disability resource professionals must maintain computers and equipment, keep pace with the rapid evolution of assistive technologies, and resolve compatibility issues between new applications and older machines. In addition, they must understand new applications well enough to train students to use them.

Survey results indicate that inadequate resources do make some accommodations quite challenging.

Most disability resource professionals manage a broad array of assistive technology options: for instance, a sizable percentage (89%) maintain computer stations, while far fewer (11%) have on hand an electronic Braille display.

- 89% - University-owned computers
- 84.8% - test-to-speech
- 63.8% - speech-to-text
- 63.5% - screen reader or magnifier
- 49.1% - Large monitors
- 45.1% - adaptive keyboard / mouse
- 37.5% - video magnifier
- 35.2% - reader pen
- 11% - electronic Braille display
- A variety of seating and furniture options

Survey results indicate that inadequate resources do make some accommodations quite challenging. After “private testing space,” the most difficult accommodations to provide are 1) a scribe, reader, or ASL interpreter and 2) Braille format. Equitable access must not be contingent upon a student’s specific accommodation needs. An institution is responsible for obtaining necessary resources in a timely manner so that a test-taker can complete a test at about same time as other students in a course. While atypical needs may feel daunting to address, staff must find a way to provide testing that is accessible to the student, making it possible for them to focus on what they have learned.

Testing accommodations raise important challenges, even when things go smoothly, due to the broad variety of accommodations that have been developed and the need to administer several tests, each tailored to individual accommodations, at the same time.

III B. Approaches to Promoting Stress Management

Particularly during high-volume periods in the semester, supporting students can hamper efficient testing operations. Workgroup members report a variety of proactive strategies to anticipate and effectively support students: updating to the environment with elements such as softer lighting and dynamic seating

and allowing (or providing) a light snack at check-in. Designating a point-person on staff to help students manage stress or to connect with crisis intervention resources can prevent student stress from infringing on testing operations.

A handful of responding DRO have partnered with Counseling Services to:

- develop a workshop or series about strategies to manage or overcome test anxiety.
- create informational resources to reinforce proactive strategies for managing test anxiety.
- run a regular meditation group.

III C. Artificial Intelligence and Accommodated Testing

Increasingly, advocates recognize the extraordinary promise of generative AI to transform the lives of disabled people. As Stanberry et al. (2023) write, “No doubt these advances have been beneficial for all—but they’ve been life-altering for some.” College students report using AI to prepare for tests, generating mnemonics, diagrams, practice tests, summaries, or audio versions of readings. Brophy (2025) points out that in some instances, students are compensating for difficulties learning the material; in others, they are simply developing effective learning strategies.

The increased use of artificial intelligence technologies poses new challenges to longstanding efforts to balance equitable access and academic integrity in proctored testing. In this emerging and rapidly changing landscape, Disability Resource Professionals must work with departments/faculty to determine when the use of AI constitutes a reasonable accommodation, in what conditions it is permissible to use AI in proctored testing, and when its use compromises academic integrity or fundamentally alters an assessment instrument.

Disability resource professionals can contribute disability-related expertise to ongoing efforts to develop campus policies for the use of AI, supporting its ethical and appropriate use by championing the campuswide adoption of AI tools that enhance learning and test preparation for all students. Professionals can also challenge any impulse to restrict the use of AI in ways that have a disparate impact on disabled students, pointing out (as just one example) that efforts to thwart students’ use of AI by returning to pen-and-paper assessments disadvantages students who must rely on a computer to produce their coursework. Simply updating faculty forms for test instructions to

request parameters for the use of AI can support campus-wide work to develop disability-inclusive policy.

Disability resource professionals can contribute disability-related expertise to ongoing efforts to develop campus policies for the use of AI

III D. Academic Integrity

Common Proctoring Methods

Faced with managing a broad variety of testing modalities, responding offices most often rely on a combination of proctoring methods and tools. Variables include available space, staffing, resources, and the modality of a given exam (i.e., online or in person). The most common proctoring method is video camera, used by nearly two-thirds (65.1%) of responding offices, followed by live proctoring, pass-by proctoring, and on-line proctoring.

Cameras (65.1%): Cameras are located in the testing areas while staff monitor testing activity on screens. It is best practice to communicate that cameras are in use in a variety of ways so that students are not surprised.

Live Proctoring in Rooms (56.2%): DROs may staff student workers to be in rooms while students take tests.

Pass-by Proctoring (41.2%): DROs implement intermittent checks, walking through the testing area or passing by windows to the testing space.

Online Proctoring (30.4%): Online proctoring tools such as Respondus may be used to proctor both remote on-line and in-person exams.

No Proctoring (2.4%): A handful of survey respondents rely exclusively upon a campus Honor Code to ensure testing integrity. In other DROs, inadequate staffing, a challenging layout of testing spaces, or other constraints may result in little to no proctoring of accommodated tests.

Remote Proctoring / Online Proctoring Systems

Remote proctoring, also called online proctoring systems, attempt to replicate the conditions of in-person proctoring using digital surveillance tools, including video and audio surveillance, automated detection technologies, and environmental scanning to identify violations of academic integrity. Remote proctoring appears equitable: all test-takers are subject to the same testing environment and have expressed similar

concerns about data privacy, post-exam monitoring (where the system continues to run in the background even after the test is completed), the misinterpretation of neutral movement as suspect behavior, and the overthinking and inhibition that is awakened by this combination of concerns.

To the greatest extent possible, proctoring conditions for an accommodated test should replicate the classroom testing environment as described by the instructor.

Equity Considerations for Proctoring

Several features of online proctoring systems also have a disparate impact on some test-takers, including students with darker skin tones and disabled students. The proctoring system may be incompatible with assistive technology, and in at least one study, flagged a student for cheating for zooming in on (i.e. enlarging) the test to access it. Students for whom heightened anxiety is a feature of their disability note that increased cognitive load impacts their ability to demonstrate what they have learned, and they worry more about the consequences of requesting approved accommodations, such as bathroom breaks. Kwapisz et al. (2025) suggest several steps that professionals can take to alleviate student concerns and support successful test-taking:

- Use assistive technologies and remote proctoring software in combination before a test to verify compatibility and functionality.
- Provide clear and accessible information about how the online proctoring system functions and what sort of data it collects.
- Demonstrate how to ensure that the online proctoring system closes at the conclusion of a test, particularly when students are using their own computer.
- Invite students to consent to the conditions of remote proctoring. If students are hesitant to consent formally to these conditions, consider creating an advisory group, including students, charged with reviewing protocols for remote proctoring.

Proctoring is a critical component of maintaining academic integrity during accommodated testing. To the greatest extent possible, proctoring conditions for

an accommodated test should replicate the classroom testing environment as described by the instructor. For instance:

- If students testing in the classroom can use a note-sheet for the exam, then students with testing accommodations should also be permitted to use a note-sheet in a format they can access.
- If students testing in the classroom use their own computer to take a test, then students with testing accommodations should also be permitted to use their own computer.

However, survey findings suggest that testing conditions do not always align: for example, only three-quarters (75.1%) of survey respondents allow students to use their personal computer when instructors allow it, and a small subset of respondents (6.3%) never allow students to use their own computers. Review forms and processes to align testing experiences as much as possible.

Some differences may be difficult to address, whether due to specific accommodations or the constraints of accommodated testing spaces and resources. For example, ensuring exam integrity, access, and student safety while managing a large volume of accommodated exams with limited staff and testing space may require the use of cameras rather than in-person proctors, stowing book bags in lockers rather than under desks, and granting permission to snack and drink or use the restroom.

It is important to reflect upon the implications of differences, not only between disabled students and non-disabled students, but among populations within the disabled student community on your campus, bearing in mind that adequate proctoring capacity is not the sole responsibility of the DRO or testing center.

Handling Infractions

When a student is suspected of cheating on an exam in the DRO/testing center, faculty should be promptly notified. At the request of faculty, some DROs may submit an informational report to the campus student conduct office or another designated authority. Because infractions are the purview of faculty, such reports are often marked, “for information only.”

While not otherwise involved in determinations about suspected cheating, disability resource professionals can provide guidance to ensure that disabled students are treated fairly— subject to the same institutional

processes and eventual consequences—as students taking the same test in the classroom. For instance, given the prevalence of cameras for proctoring accommodated tests, the appropriate use of video footage is an important consideration. Adhering to campuswide policies and practices ensures that disabled students are not subjected to a higher degree of scrutiny than their peers testing without the presence of cameras, in the classroom. A suspected or confirmed violation of academic integrity cannot be used to deny or restrict a student’s access to testing accommodations; their right to equitable access remains intact.

III E. Final Exams

Survey results indicate that, across postsecondary institutions of varying types and sizes, final examinations account for one-quarter to one-third of all tests administered during a regular academic term. Coordinating logistics for this high-volume period is a complex undertaking that usually begins weeks in advance and can significantly disrupt routine operations. Preparatory activities include recruiting and training staff volunteers from other campus units, securing accessible and appropriate spaces for accommodated testing, and managing increased scheduling. When staffing and space is inadequate to begin with, preparation for finals is that much more complicated.

Such preparations compound office schedules that are already quite demanding. Once the examination period begins, staff attention may shift exclusively to managing finals logistics. These tasks may include overseeing check-in procedures, proctoring exams, returning completed exams to faculty, and addressing student concerns. An intense focus can limit the office’s capacity to address other matters.

The scale of final examinations introduces additional challenges, particularly in securing adequate space. It is often difficult to obtain multiple rooms that can be configured to reduce distractions. As a result, students may be placed in larger, classroom-style settings with more occupants than is feasible during the regular term. Staff should make every effort to minimize distractions in these spaces, but limited staffing, inflexible room configurations, and simultaneous exam start times complicate their efforts. Institutions must anticipate these limitations and implement proactive measures to preserve testing integrity and accessibility.

III F. Policies

Clear and accessible testing policies are essential for both students and faculty. These policies should be communicated through multiple channels, including the institution’s website, email notifications, and in-person training sessions where appropriate. To ensure understanding, students may be asked to review and acknowledge these policies on a regular basis.

Timelines for submitting tests must account for the time and resources required by staff to coordinate logistics effectively. Key policy considerations include:

Scheduling Requirements: Due dates and procedures for students (or faculty, if responsible) to schedule exams in the testing center.

Faculty Responsibilities: Due dates for submitting tests and administration details, including standard test duration, resources permitted, and any special instructions.

Student Check-In and Check-Out Procedures:

Clear guidelines for arrival, late arrivals, identification, and test completion processes. A clearly-articulated 15-minute grace period can improve clarity of expectations.

Proctoring and Academic Integrity: Clear guidance about the use of AI in accommodated testing, based in part on approved accommodations for individual students as well as protocols for monitoring exams and responding to suspected violations of academic integrity.

Missed Due Dates: Procedures for handling late exam requests and associated implications.

In-Exam Scenarios:

- Storage of personal belongings
- Breaks during the exam
- Student questions requiring faculty input
- Management of interruptions (e.g., medical emergencies, fire alarms, natural disasters, power outages)
- Processes related to violations of academic integrity

Institutions should ensure these policies are consistently applied and regularly reviewed in light of the four pillars: institutional compliance, equity, integrity, and work/life balance.

Part IV: Managing Resources

IV A: The Impact of Inadequate Resources

Accommodated testing systems require sufficient staffing, space, and infrastructure to operate effectively. Inadequate resources make campuses more vulnerable to inconsistent implementation, delayed accommodations, and deviations from approved access plans—each of which may undermine students' opportunity to achieve their academic goals and expose the institution to complaints, grievances, or legal scrutiny. Inadequate resources stress systems and people, compounding complexity and heightening tensions for all stakeholders.

Effective testing management demands meticulous attention to detail. Insufficient staffing can lead to administrative errors: exams may not be available when students arrive; faculty instructions (e.g., permitted materials) may be missing; the need for an alternative format may be overlooked; testing space may not be available. Systemic understaffing may result in a need to schedule exams earlier, delays in returning completed exams to faculty, and reduced capacity to proctor or plan for final exams. Such inefficiencies ultimately compromise institutional compliance, equity, integrity, and staff capacity to engage in the kind of long-term planning and outreach that instills a sense of institutional responsibility that is broadly shared among stakeholders and departments.

Equity: A requirement for students to schedule testing accommodations with greater advance notice increases their organizational burden as well as the probability of late requests, appeals for exceptions, and schedule changes due to changes in faculty plans, heightening tensions among all parties.

Exam Integrity: Stressed operations may undermine capacity to implement proctoring per faculty guidance and diminish trust among stakeholders.

Staff Morale: Resource shortages often force staff to forgo breaks, work extended hours, and take on additional responsibilities. Members of this workgroup (i.e. contributing authors) highlight how an enterprise that is at once mandated and functionally unattainable accelerates burnout and isolates the office, undermining efforts to advance disability access and equity.

Strategic Limitations: The impact of persistent resource gaps hinders big-picture planning and

goals, such as office alignment with AHEAD Program Domains, Standards, and Performance Indicators and institutional innovation goals, yet strategic efforts can improve operations.

IV B. Managing Time

Accommodation Database Systems:

A “Game-Changer”

A well-designed accommodation database can significantly reduce staff workload, yet only 52.8% of survey respondents use one. A database (such as AIM, Accommodate, or Clockwork) is essential for managing the most common and labor-intensive disability services, such as testing, notetaking, communication access, alternative media, equipment loans, and appointment scheduling. These systems also centralize documentation, staff notes, and communications for easy reference.

Despite the advantages of a database system, one quarter of survey respondents (24.9%) continue to rely on inefficient workarounds like .pdf forms, spreadsheets, and email, resulting in time-consuming coordination and reduced effectiveness. A centralized database streamlines operations and improves the experience for students, faculty, and staff alike. It is no wonder that four survey respondents whose offices recently began using a database call it “a game-changer.”

A thoughtfully selected database, customized to meet local needs, can quickly result in efficiencies that free up staff time. Using database streamlines coordination of many tasks in a DRO, but benefits are clearest when it comes to coordinating testing accommodations.

Students can schedule exams; view scheduled exam requests and locations; receive reminders regarding upcoming exams; sign e-agreements; and review testing policies.

Faculty can receive automatic notification of a student scheduling an exam; upload a copy of their exams in the secure, online portal; provide information about exams and allowable materials; and review testing policies.

Staff can view all scheduled tests in one place, including where each exam is in the scheduling process; send automatic reminders to students and faculty about upcoming exams; create customizable course information templates to re-

quest specific information from faculty; assign proctors; assign testing locations; easily view and extract testing data for reporting measures; create and send bulk emails; create e-signed agreements for students; and communicate with both students and faculty.

Advance Scheduling

According to the survey, timely communication from faculty and students is, by far, the most common challenge to the administration of testing accommodations. More than three-quarters (76.4%) of survey respondents cite receiving tests late as the most frequent challenge caused by instructors, and 87.6% cite late scheduling and rescheduling as the most common challenges posed by students.

Advance scheduling of accommodated exams ensures the opportunity to verify the details of each accommodated test to be administered at a given time and to consider larger issues that may arise due to capacity constraints. For each scheduled test, staff need time to:

- Confirm test details with faculty.
- Reserve appropriate testing space and technology.
- Create an accessible test format.
- Schedule a reader, scribe, or ASL interpreter to assist with test administration.

The span of time required to accomplish the tasks associated with a single accommodated test varies:

- Faculty and graduate TAs must know how to implement extended time for online tests.
- Online tests that involve assistive technology or adaptive devices require set-up time.
- Tests administered through an online platform may require proctoring via screen share.
- Tests that entail requiring a reader, scribe, or interpreter require coordination of schedules and private testing spaces.
- Tests with Braille or tactile components must be produced and possibly mailed.

Despite the labor that coordinating a single accommodated test may entail,

- nearly half of all survey respondents (44%) are able to schedule tests only 2- 3 days in advance.
- 13% indicate that walk-ins are permitted as a matter of policy or when feasible.
- 22% of testing operations require advance notice of “about a week.”

- Only a very small number of offices require advance notice of more than one week. These norms are broadly consistent across institutional sizes and types.

While the above norms are quite flexible, late scheduling by students is an ongoing logistical challenge and a stressor for all involved. A small but growing number of campuses have shifted the responsibility for scheduling to faculty/departments. The feasibility of this model depends on many variables, including the size of campus and testing operations, the accommodations management system, etc. However, coordinated effectively, this model streamlines communication, maintains institutional compliance, and relieves disabled students of a responsibility that is not borne by their peers, providing a more equitable testing experience.

Hours of Operation

Ideally, a student can schedule their classes with enough time between them to use extended time before or after the same class period in which their peers take the test. Yet only a quarter (28.1%) of responding offices maintain extended weekday hours, making it possible for a student to begin an accommodated test before an early-morning class or immediately after a late-afternoon class.

When a student is unable to test during the scheduled class times due to misalignment between the course schedule and DRO hours of operation, they must make hard choices. Testing later than the rest of the class may raise concerns about the student’s extra study time or test integrity. On the other hand, testing earlier than the rest of the class means forfeiting study time or perhaps the opportunity to attend a study group.

When taking back-to-back classes cannot be avoided, as is often the case in professional schools, or when a class begins early or late in the day, scheduling accommodated tests is a complex task that can be further complicated by the need for specific testing space and resources. Faculty/departmental flexibility and support are critical to resolving scheduling constraints. Implementing structural adjustments can also alleviate scheduling pressures:

Encourage department coordination: For large courses or tests with many accommodated students, departments can manage most accommodations. Work with departments to predetermine a number (e.g., 10 – 15 students) that shifts re-

sponsibility for proctoring to the department. This strategy requires coordination with the Provost's Office and department chairs, but it can alleviate system pressures.

Establish a standard testing schedule for campus:

Work with the Registrar and academic departments to set uniform daily exam times. Reducing the need for some details associated with individual test-takers simplifies scheduling considerably.

Implement block scheduling internally: Require students to schedule tests during designated time blocks to optimize space usage. Block scheduling may require testing at a different time than the rest of the class, but it may solve operational challenges that relieve administrative burdens.

Adjust standard extended time accommodation:

Gather testing data to study the feasibility of reducing the standard length of extended time accommodations for most students (e.g., from double-time to 1.5 time, or from 1.5 time to 1.25 time). A principled approach to a shorter standard extension, phased in with new cohorts of students, makes better use of limited testing space.

IV C. Managing Staffing

Professional Staff

As testing accommodations increase and testing modalities multiply, the need for a dedicated testing coordinator may be clearer than ever, but these trends don't adequately capture the importance of the role. Administering testing accommodations is specialized professional labor: decision-making entails knowledge of disability law, assessment validity, assistive technology, campus systems, and student support practices. Errors can have significant academic and legal consequences.

Although it can be challenging to fill part-time positions and to retain part-time employees, several factors make an additional, full-time position difficult to justify and to sustain. A comprehensive staffing needs assessment should consider:

- The potential benefits of increased staffing for students and faculty
- Potential benefits to overextended colleagues in the DRO
- Patterns of testing demand by day and time
- Peak testing periods during the academic term
- Feasibility of early morning and evening testing, including the use of trained students as proctors (See National College Testing Association, 2025).

Logistics associated with coordinating a single accommodated exam, let alone several at the same time, are considerable, yet testing needs fluctuate over the course of an academic term and may be minimal in some periods of the calendar year.

Adequate staffing ensures continued operations and regular lunch and other breaks for staff, even when someone is out of the office. Although not a perfect indicator, a full-time testing coordinator may be warranted if more than 100 accommodated tests are administered in a given week during the regular term. The testing coordinator may be able to assume additional responsibilities during off-peak periods, such as coordinating the reception area, conducting initial meetings with students, or maintaining computers, assistive technology, and other equipment.

Bear in mind that all component parts of that appointment must be sufficiently flexible, and the staff sufficiently nimble, to juggle responsibilities that may sometimes conflict, especially when unforeseen circumstances arise.

Professionals managing small offices often coordinate every aspect of accommodated testing.

Small Offices

The AHEAD Survey on Disability Resource Office Structures and Programs, last administered in 2022 (and next in 2026), defines a small office as having between 0 and 2 FTE professional staff. Offices with less than 2 FTE represent 35.2% of responses for the Testing Accommodations Survey; 28.3% of respondents report a DRO staff of only 1 FTE or a partial appointment.

Small offices span all institution types and sizes, with most small offices (57.1%) located at institutions with an overall student body of between 1,000 and 5,000 students. Surprisingly, the data profile for offices with less than 2 FTE differs little from that of larger offices:

- About the same proportion of professionals indicate that they have / do not have adequate resources to implement testing accommodations effectively, or that they "make things work."
- In small offices and across all responding institutions, 20% of respondents must seek additional testing spaces "always" or "regularly."

- On average, small offices manage a similar number of private testing spaces, 4.2 compared to 5 among all responding offices. On the other hand, small offices have markedly fewer low-distraction testing spaces available: 13 vs. 19 across all responding DRO.

Two differences in the data seem noteworthy. First, while 52.8% of all responding offices use a database such as AIM or Clockwork to track accommodations, only a third (33.3%) of small offices do so. Small offices are more likely to rely upon manual and pen and paper tracking (42.4%), a homegrown system (12.9%), or a different system in use at their institution. Manual systems increase the likelihood of missed deadlines, inconsistency in implementing accommodations, and diminished capacity to communicate with students and faculty.

Student workers have neither the professional expertise nor the specialized skills to oversee operations or manage issues as they arise.

Moreover, without a testing coordinator, professionals managing small offices often coordinate every area indicated in Part III of this report, from coordinating scheduling, spaces, communication and assistive technology to ensuring academic integrity. Of course, these activities are set in motion only *after* the same professional has undertaken the interactive process to determine that accommodated testing provides appropriate support. In small offices, outcomes comparable to larger offices are only achieved through individual overextension, informal workarounds, and reliance on personal expertise rather than sustainable systems. As a result, small offices are disproportionately vulnerable to error and disruption due to staff absences, turnover, illness, or competing institutional demands.

Student Employees

Survey findings confirm that many DROs and campus testing centers rely on graduate and undergraduate student employees to support the administration of accommodated testing. These student workers play varied roles, ranging from student reception to proctoring responsibilities.

Recently revised Professional Standards and Guidelines for Test Centers (2nd ed. 2025) issued by the National Collegiate Testing Association stress the importance of identifying one individual who is accountable for effective testing operations. The new Standards and Guidelines make no distinction between roles appropriate to graduate and undergraduate students, specifying that student staff can serve in a supportive role “such as performing office tasks or monitoring test takers for unauthorized activities, with no access to secure testing materials or passwords.” Further, NCTA strongly encourages a proactive approach: student employees may proctor tests only if procedures to minimize conflicts of interest and ensure test integrity are in place prior to the employment of students. This may include regular and systematic training and signing an attestation of compliance with accommodated testing procedures.

Student contributions can relieve some pressure points in testing operations, but student workers have neither the professional expertise nor the specialized skills to oversee operations or manage issues as they arise. Reliance on student labor introduces challenges related to training, turnover, and role limitations.

Rates of Student Employment

Forty-six percent of responding schools report employing graduate students for accommodated testing operations. In this subset of respondents, graduate students work a combined average of 47 hours per week in DRO or testing centers (this figure does not include time spent administering accommodations on behalf of academic departments). Because graduate students are legally able to access student records, they often assume broader coordination responsibilities. Approximately 53% of responding institutions employ undergraduate students in DROs or testing centers, averaging a combined 82 hours of undergraduate labor per week.

IV D. Managing Spaces

When a DRO/testing center has sufficient space to meet the accommodated testing demand, testing operations are much more efficient. Adequate space for accommodated testing includes seating that is sufficient to meet or exceed peak demand during the semester. Five to ten seats beyond what is usually needed make it possible to manage last-minute changes to the testing schedule. Sufficient space between students, measures to limit sound disturbances, adequate lighting, a variety of adjustable

furniture options, and restroom access are all important features to consider, as is the functional capacity to proctor exams in different modalities (i.e. online and in person) at the same time (National Collegiate Testing Association, 2022).

When testing center space inconsistently meets demand for accommodated testing, staff may routinely count seats, estimate how long each student will spend on an exam, forecast what may still be scheduled against what is currently scheduled, and plan for worst-case scenarios by booking additional rooms or spaces that may or may not be needed.

Consider:

- Half (49.1%) of survey respondents cite the effective management of spaces / seats for accommodated testing as the most common operational challenge.
- Fifteen percent of respondents indicate that they must regularly seek additional testing spaces.
- Another 5% indicate that they must always seek testing spaces.
- When invited to request one additional resource, nearly one-third (30.4%) of survey respondents requested additional testing spaces.

Many variables influence the management of testing spaces, including:

- The average number of daily test-takers
- The duration of tests
- The frequency and length of extended-time accommodations
- The availability of private rooms
- The size, capacity, and design-features of seats designated as distraction-reduced.
- The accessible technology available
- The availability and proximity of additional, suitable seating during peak periods

Especially when suitable spaces are in short supply, this sort of complex decision-making represents a high cognitive load and consumes an exceptional amount of time.

Relocation of the DRO typically requires long-term planning and renovation, but incremental improvements to existing spaces may be feasible in the short-term. Enhancements may include installing partitions for low-distraction testing or incorporating soundproof pods or enclosed carrels to create private rooms.

Half of survey respondents cite the effective management of spaces / seats for accommodated testing as the most common operational challenge.

Defining Reduced-Distraction Testing Spaces

There are no standard specifications for a reduced-distraction testing space beyond the general parameter that it should feature elements that limit the likelihood of distractions compared to the average classroom. A combination of local factors determines what is possible. Low-distraction testing areas may include features such as:

- A location or design elements (such as carpeting, sound-absorption panels) that mitigate sound from hallways, adjoining rooms, or the outdoors.
- Pathways intended to minimize the impact of students coming and going.
- Additional space between seats
- Cubicles or partitions between seats
- Seating that faces the wall
- Larger worktables that create space between test-takers
- White noise machines in the room and/or near the entrance
- A commitment to no conversations between students and proctors in the testing room

Students may also use ear plugs or noise-cancelling headphones to further reduce the likelihood of distractions.

Nearly 4% of responding programs have no readily available low-distraction spaces. In the absence of designated space with reduced-distraction elements, DROs should work with faculty and other campus personnel to determine the parameters for reduced-distraction spaces on campus and make these widely available in the interests of maintaining consistency and support for disabled students testing outside of the DRO or Testing Center.

Private Testing Spaces

Eight percent of survey respondents reported having no regular access to private testing spaces. Designed to accommodate only one test-taker at a time, private testing spaces represent the most frequently cited “accommodation that is difficult to manage given institutional constraints” in the survey.

Nearly 4% of responding programs have no readily available low-distraction spaces. Eight percent of survey respondents reported having no regular access to private testing spaces.

A private testing room should be approved only in limited circumstances. While most students—regardless of disability status—might prefer to test alone, private spaces are generally reserved for situations in which communication such as speech-to-text, a reader, an ASL interpreter, or a scribe is needed to complete the exam or when disability-related behaviors may be a distraction for other test-takers. Particularly if they are in short supply, it may be helpful to develop guidelines for approving the use of private testing spaces.

IV E. Managing Budgets

Funding Models for Testing Accommodations

Funding strategies for implementing testing accommodations are influenced by both the organizational location of the DRO and the specific models in use for testing accommodations at the institution. Four in five responding DROs (79.8%) rely primarily on an operating budget to support testing accommodations; academic departments sometimes supply graduate assistant positions or share undergraduate work-study allocations. An allocation from student fees may also supplement resources for administering testing accommodations.

Institutions that maintain a dedicated Testing Center may offset operational costs with revenue generated from fee-based examinations (e.g., standardized or certification exams). A smaller proportion of survey respondents report reliance on external funding sources, including grants (5.8%) and donor contributions (5%).

Principles to Guide an Increased Investment

Efforts to secure additional resources for testing accommodations should be informed by three key principles:

1. **Equity in Assessment:** Testing accommodations aim to ensure that students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to demonstrate mastery of course content.
2. **Operational Efficiency:** Inefficient processes incur hidden costs; streamlining operations can free time and resources for other priorities.

3. **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** While one-time expenses are generally easier to justify, recurring costs that advance equity, ensure equitable academic integrity, or improve efficiency are often worthwhile strategic investments.

IV F. Case Study: A Well-Oiled Machine

AHEAD College administers 3,000 accommodated tests per year in their 40-seat Testing Center. In addition to accommodated tests, the Testing Center administers standardized tests, proctors make-up tests, and serves students who require a separate testing environment for a variety of reasons.

Work with faculty and other campus personnel to determine the parameters for reduced-distraction spaces on campus and make these widely available.

Roberto serves as Associate Director of Learning Resources, and testing is one area he oversees. Casey, who reports to Roberto, is the testing coordinator with an office in the Testing Center. Roberto coordinates testing when Casey is away or when the volume of tests is high. Meili is a part time assistant coordinator who helps with tests after week two when tasks such as note-taking coordination, classroom relocation, and furniture placement have slowed. Casey manages a team of student proctors.

The Testing Center is open 8:00-5:00 and deploys proctors to departmental spaces for accommodated tests that take place in the evening. During peak periods, the Testing Center has access to a computer lab with 15 stations and enclosed study spaces on the ground floor of the library in proximity to the Center. Disability Resources and Learning Services share a suite on the same floor and their conference room and/or staff offices can be used as needed. In addition to these additional, private spaces, departments with large numbers of accommodated tests manage their own proctoring in the department.

Like testing operations managed by a DRO, an effective centralized testing center features:

- A database system for scheduling tests and record keeping
- An adequate number of dedicated spaces and access to additional seating during peak periods

- Appropriate staffing to maintain accommodated testing operations, which includes sufficient coverage when staff are away
- Strategies for managing peak periods, such as block scheduling for start times, arrangements with departments, staggered check-in, etc.
- Tables (minimum recommended height 3 feet) with individual cubicle dividers to minimize visual stimuli
- Noise canceling headphones and earplugs at each station, to minimize auditory stimuli
- Assistive technology, adaptive devices, and adjustable furniture
- A means to properly monitor test processing and proctoring to uphold integrity
- Accessible tests in an electronic format, provided on time
- Timely scheduling on the part of faculty and students

A testing center is ideal for any learner with a need to test outside of the classroom. The fact that it serves a variety of populations, including disabled students, diminishes stigma a student may feel about using their accommodations. A dedicated Testing Center advances a shared sense of institutional responsibility, supports consistency in operations and, by serving every student, eliminates any unique burden for students with disability.

Part V: Managing Resources

This summary and reflection exercise is intended to be used after reading the practice paper, **Understanding and Assessing Testing Accommodations**. Using data and recommendations from the paper, create materials to share with your department supervisor and campus leaders.

Foundations

See Part II

- Effective accommodated testing operations rests upon four values: institutional responsibility, equity for disabled students, academic integrity, and work/life balance.
- Accommodated testing has increased and accommodations have diversified over the past few years.
- Accommodated testing may be administered through the DRO, a campus Testing Center, and / or academic departments. Faculty/departments may also adopt assessment strategies that reduce some accommodation needs. A hybrid model that blends two or more of these approaches is common.

Questions to consider

- How is accommodated testing administered?
- What local factors explain changes in testing accommodations over the past few years?
- How are testing accommodations experienced by disabled students and faculty?
- Where is universal design reflected in institutional policy, mission, strategic plan, etc.? If absent, can you begin to imagine how policy can better address the learning and assessment needs of all students?
- Where is universal design operationalized? Which departments have adopted a broader approach to assessment, from simple classroom strategies to universal design for learning and assessment? As a thought leader on disability issues, can you leverage these departments as catalysts for change?
- Can you discern response to universal-design strategies among disabled students and faculty, i.e. by tracking persistence in these programs, collecting qualitative information, or through other means?
- Based on their feedback and your own analysis, to what extent do accommodated testing operations realize the four values: institutional responsibility, equity for disabled students, academic integrity, and work/life balance?

Time

See Part IV B.

- An accommodations database system streamlines logistics for accommodated testing, reducing staff workload and the likelihood of errors.
- The logistics for accommodated testing may also be reduced by aligning testing schedules in a variety of ways.
- A variety of strategies and partnerships can ensure that real-time support to test-takers does not distract from operations.
- Video generated for proctoring purposes should be managed and used in accordance with campuswide surveillance policies.

Questions to consider

- In what ways can the current tracking system improve for greater accuracy, efficiency, and fairness to students?
- How much advance notice is currently required of students and faculty?
 - a. What operational changes would shorten advance notice to 2-3 days?
 - b. What changes would enable all students to schedule an accommodated test at approximately the same time as students taking it in class?
- What responsibilities for accommodated testing are borne by faculty/departments?
 - a. In what ways are these responsibilities adequately met in most cases?
 - b. What strategies & partnerships can improve faculty/departmental awareness and uptake of expectations for accommodated testing?

Staffing

See Part IV C.

- Administering testing accommodations requires knowledge of disabilities, expertise in disability law, assessment, assistive technology, and campus systems.
- Small offices often achieve comparable outcomes to larger ones through individual overextension, manual tracking systems, and informal workarounds.
- With appropriate safeguards in place, students can assume responsibilities for proctoring, but turnover among students is high and more frequent training is required.

Questions to consider

Complete the following tables to identify gaps in staff coverage. Use benchmarks included in Appendices A and B to compare staffing levels at institutions of similar size and type.

- What does your staffing data indicate about current needs?
- Describe the impact of inadequate testing resources on DRO staff and operations.
- What one-time investments (an accommodations database, recent technology or licenses, etc.) can streamline and improve operations?
- Once one-time investments have been articulated, draft a proposal for additional staffing. Assuming appropriate procedures have been implemented to ensure academic integrity, what tasks can be performed by:
 - o student workers
 - o professional staff

If drafting a rationale for a full-time position, be sure to explain how the position will support office operations in off-peak periods.

Regular term

Staffing	Current	Currently needed	Projected (in 3 years)	Benchmarks (size/type)
Professional staff (FTE)				
Graduate students (hours / week)				
Undergraduates (hours ./ week)				
Volunteers (hours / week)				

Finals

Staffing	Current	Currently needed	Projected (in 3 years)	Benchmarks (size/type)
Professional staff (FTE)				
Graduate students (hours / week)				
Undergraduates (hours ./ week)				
Volunteers (hours / week)				

Spaces

See Section IV D.

- When designated testing space is adequate to meet demand, inclusive of inevitable last-minute changes to student schedules, testing operations are much easier to manage.
- Reserve private testing spaces for tests requiring auxiliary aids and when a test-taker's disability may create a distraction for others.
- Comparatively inexpensive design features can create a distraction-reduced space.

Complete the following tables to quantify the need for additional spaces during the regular term and during finals. Consult Appendices A and B to compare your campus to postsecondary institutions of similar size and type.

Questions to consider

- How often do seats for accommodated testing reach or exceed capacity?
- Describe the process for locating additional seating.
- In any week during the regular term, how much time is dedicated to locating and reserving additional seating?
- Would needs be offset by block scheduling?
- What are the greatest staffing needs during final exams? How might these needs be met internally or by working with other stakeholders on campus?

Regular term

Spaces	Current	Currently needed	Projected (in 3 years)	Benchmarks
Private testing spaces				
Reduced-distraction testing seats				

Finals

Spaces	Current	Currently needed	Projected (in 3 years)	Benchmarks
Private testing spaces				
Reduced-distraction testing seats				

Equipment

See III A.

- Managing technology requires staff to maintain equipment, troubleshoot compatibility issues, keep up with rapidly evolving assistive tech, and learn new tools well enough to train students to use them.
- On many campuses, faculty produce some accessible formats themselves.
- Conditions for accommodated testing should align with classroom testing parameters as closely as possible, including the use of personal computers.
- Equitable access cannot depend on typical needs or staff expertise alone; campuses must procure the technology and expertise to support accessible testing.

Questions to consider

- Is hardware replaced on a regular rotation or as needed?
- If the office does not maintain an inventory of equipment, consider creating one and projecting needs based on current trends.
- If additional reduced-distraction seating can be created with partitions and other one-time purchases, how much would these items cost?

Budgets

See IV E.

- A large majority of DROs rely on their own operating budgets to support testing accommodations, sometimes supplemented by the provision of graduate student positions by academic departments, work-study funds, and student fees.
- Three principles guide requests for increased investment: ensuring equitable assessment, improving operational efficiency, and recognizing that both one-time and recurring costs can yield significant operational benefits.
- When a full renovation isn't feasible, the addition of partitions, soundproof pods, or enclosed carrels can improve testing conditions.
- Technology and equipment represent ongoing expenses, including proctoring tools, assistive tech, software subscriptions, and general supplies.

Questions to consider

- What additional resources would be ideal? Realistic? Draft a rationale based on current and projected need.
- How would additional resources benefit testing operations for the testing center staff, students, and/or faculty?
- Thought experiment: If your campus does not already maintain one, what campuswide needs would be met by the creation of a separate Testing Center?

Part VI: Putting it All Together

This white paper builds upon the guidance set forth in **Understanding and Assessing Disability Resource Office Staffing Needs** (2024), providing an overview of the complex and wide-ranging responsibilities of professionals managing accommodated testing operations. Taken together, the two studies are a reminder that:

- Accommodated testing only happens after it has been approved by means of an interactive process with the student.
- Administering testing accommodations represents only one area of activity in a DRO.

Use the assessment tool provided in Part V to develop a holistic, evidence-driven appeal for what is needed. Don't miss the opportunity to share what your office does well and the positive impact that additional resources would have for both disabled students and faculty. Share this rationale with your supervisor.

Then, take an additional step: set aside time in your week, each week, to engage in big-picture planning to advance a shared sense of institutional responsibility through outreach, strategic conversations, and partnerships. What is possible will vary from one campus to the next, and from one semester to the next. What seems possible on your campus at the present time?

- Can you develop and share a set of consistent parameters for a reduced-distraction testing space that would enable academic departments to manage simple accommodations, such as extended time, independently?
- Can you work with faculty or department chairs to encourage more hospitable testing practices in the classroom? Such practices may not eliminate but can reduce the need for accommodated testing services.
- Where one does not already exist, can you lead efforts to assess the benefits of a centralized Testing Center for campus? As a disability resource professional, you possess a broad and in-depth understanding of issues related to testing.

What seems possible on your campus at the present time?

It will likely be necessary to scaffold efforts over a few years. Start with department chairs and faculty whom you know to be receptive to change. Cultivate colleagues who can champion your cause, and co-develop outreach materials, whether fliers, brief how-to videos, professional development workshops, or all of the above.

Part VII: References and Appendices

References

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These benchmarks represent less an ideal than a set of data points for comparison to a broad set of institutional peers. A snapshot of the landscape may prove useful in building a narrative. Connecting with an institution's formal institutional peers is another way to develop useful points of comparison and can yield more contextualized results.

Appendix A: Testing Accommodations Data by Institution Size (overall enrollment)

Institution sizes align with those used by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES): less than 200 students; 200-999; 1,000-5,000; 5,000-10,000; 10,000-20,000; 20,000-30,000 and more than 30,000 students.

Responses of "0" were excluded from the calculation of average resources available. The number of respondents reporting "0" is provided separately. For accommodated tests administered, the number of "non-responses" (NR) is also noted below.

Student body	All	Less than 200	200-999	1k-5k	5k-10k	10k-20k	20k-30k	30k+
number (n) responses	n=381	n=3	n=27	n=161	n=71	n=58	n=28	n=33
Private spaces available	5 31r=0	1	5.2 1r=0	4.3 17r=0	8.1 6r=0	4.5 2r=0	4	9.2 1r=0
Low-distraction seats available	19 14r=0	8	8.3 2r=0	15 8r=0	17.3 1r=0	25.3 2r=0	28	34
FTE in DRO	4.5	1.7	1.1	2.2 2r=0	3	6	10	14.8
FTE in testing	1.8	0.3	0.7 10r=0	1.1 44r=0	1 10r=0	1.5 6r=0	3 2r=0	5.2 2r=0
Hours/week: Grad students	47 206r=0	0	5 21r=0	24.7 108r=0	43.3 35r=0	50.9 18r=0	61 11r=0	95.8 10r=0
Hours/week: Undergrads	84 179r=0	0	13.5 18r=0	31.4 88r=0	41.6 26r=0	64.1 21r=0	56 13r=0	334 7r=0
Regular term: tests scheduled	1,334 72 NR	230 0 NR	224 4 NR	377 39 NR	499 15 NR	1,473 4 NR	2,848 8 NR	5,361 2 NR
Regular term: tests administered	1,166 54 NR	210 0 NR	222 4 NR	372 25 NR	518 9 NR	1,132 6 NR	2,300 6 NR	4,760 4 NR
Finals: tests scheduled	386 81 NR	72 0 NR	43 6 NR	100 30 NR	135 16 NR	435 8 NR	975 20 NR	1,446 1 NR
Finals: tests administered	343 62 NR	76 0 NR	40 6 NR	99 27 NR	140 10 NR	402 9 NR	806 7 NR	1,287 3 NR

Appendix B: Testing Accommodations Data by Institution Type

Institution types are based on the 2021 Carnegie Classification: Associate's, Baccalaureate, Master's, Doctoral, and Special Focus.

Responses of "0" were excluded from the calculation of average resources available. The number of respondents reporting "0" is provided separately. For accommodated tests administered, the number of "non-responses" (NR) is also noted below.

PSE type	All PSE	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctoral	Special Focus
number (n) responses	n=381	n=71	n=159	n=54	n=80	n=17
Private spaces available	5 31r=0	5 7r=0	5 15r=0	3.5 1r=0	8.9 5r=0	8 2r=0
Low-distraction seats available	19 14r=0	15 4r=0	18 4r=0	15.7 1r=0	27.3 3r=0	14 1r=0
FTE in DRO	4.5 3r=0	3	3.5 1r=0	4.6	8.6 2r=0	1.5
FTE in testing	1.8 75r=0	1.2 11r=0	1.3 37r=0	1.5 10r=0	2.3 9r=0	1.3 6r=0
Hours/week: Grad students	47 206r=0	182 68r=0	42 85r=0	72 27r=0	50.7 18r=0	12 8r=0
Hours/week: Undergrads	84 179r=0	34 50r=0	50 57r=0	47.3 18r=0	89.4 28r=0	6 16r=0
Regular term: tests scheduled*	1,334 83 NR	437 17 NR	1,299 30 NR	1,288 8 NR	2,381 20 NR	399 8 NR
Regular term: tests administered*	1,166 73 NR	431 13 NR	1,120 27 NR	1,120 6 NR	2,082 19 NR	401 8 NR
Finals: tests scheduled*	386 91 NR	113 20 NR	384 33 NR	445 5 NR	635 24 NR	177 9 NR
Finals: tests administered*	343 82 NR	107 17 NR	337 29 NR	389 4 NR	573 23 NR	177 9 NR